

3.0 HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

3.1 Introduction

The history of the Church Road and Red Lion areas can be broadly divided into three eras: pre-railroad, rural village, and post-World War II (WWII) development. In the pre-railroad era, Red Lion was a small but thriving village at the intersection of Red Lion Road, Church Road, and Bear-Corbitt Road (the precursor to Route 7). The village was centered around the Red Lion Tavern, which dated to the Colonial era. North of Red Lion the landscape along Church Road was dominated by large residential and tenant farms owned by a discrete number of owners. The completion of the New Castle & Frenchtown Railroad (NC&F) in 1831, which bypassed Red Lion, and the closing of the Red Lion Tavern shortly thereafter, arrested Red Lion's growth. Bear Station, a stop on the NC&F, became the primary transfer point and the largest community in the area. Red Lion became a rural village centered around the Lebanon (later Red Lion) Methodist Church. As the nineteenth century progressed, the agricultural landscape also changed, as large landholdings were divided into smaller farms. In the early and mid-twentieth century, a small amount of infill was added to Red Lion, primarily along Route 7. The rural landscape along Church Road remained largely intact until the post-WWII era, when Ranch style houses and other late twentieth century vernacular style residences were constructed on both sides of the road.

3.2 Pre-Railroad Era (1701-1837)

Early sustained settlement of land within Pencader and New Castle hundreds occurred after a 1701 William Penn grant of 12,141.0 ha (30,000.0 ac) known as the Welsh Tract. The Welsh settlers developed the natural resources in the Iron Hill area and instantiated Penn's claim to the region against the claims of George Talbot, who also received a grant of land in the area from George Calvert, Lord Baltimore (Scharf 1888:950). Although they oriented their economic activities toward agriculture, the Welsh settlers also constructed iron pits, bloomeries, and furnaces at various times to process the iron ore mined from Iron Hill (Scharf 1888:951, 957; Owen and Owen 1977:4-5).

In 1705, the lands on Pigeon Run and Red Lion Creek, a total of 445.2 ha (1,100.0 ac), was resurveyed by George Deakayne. By 1739, William Rhodes had established an estate, known as

Poplar Neck, at the confluence of Pigeon Run and Red Lion Creek. The property was subdivided in the 1760s. Near the Rhodes estate was the original Red Lion Tavern, which was mentioned in a deed transferring property between members of the Rhodes family. The tavern building was reportedly destroyed by fire. A public house of the same name was opened some time after the American Revolution. It was rebuilt in 1823, but subsequently closed in 1837, the NC&F having diverted patronage (Scharf 1888:851, 853). At this time, William Silver and his family also ran a store in the village (see Section 3.3, below).

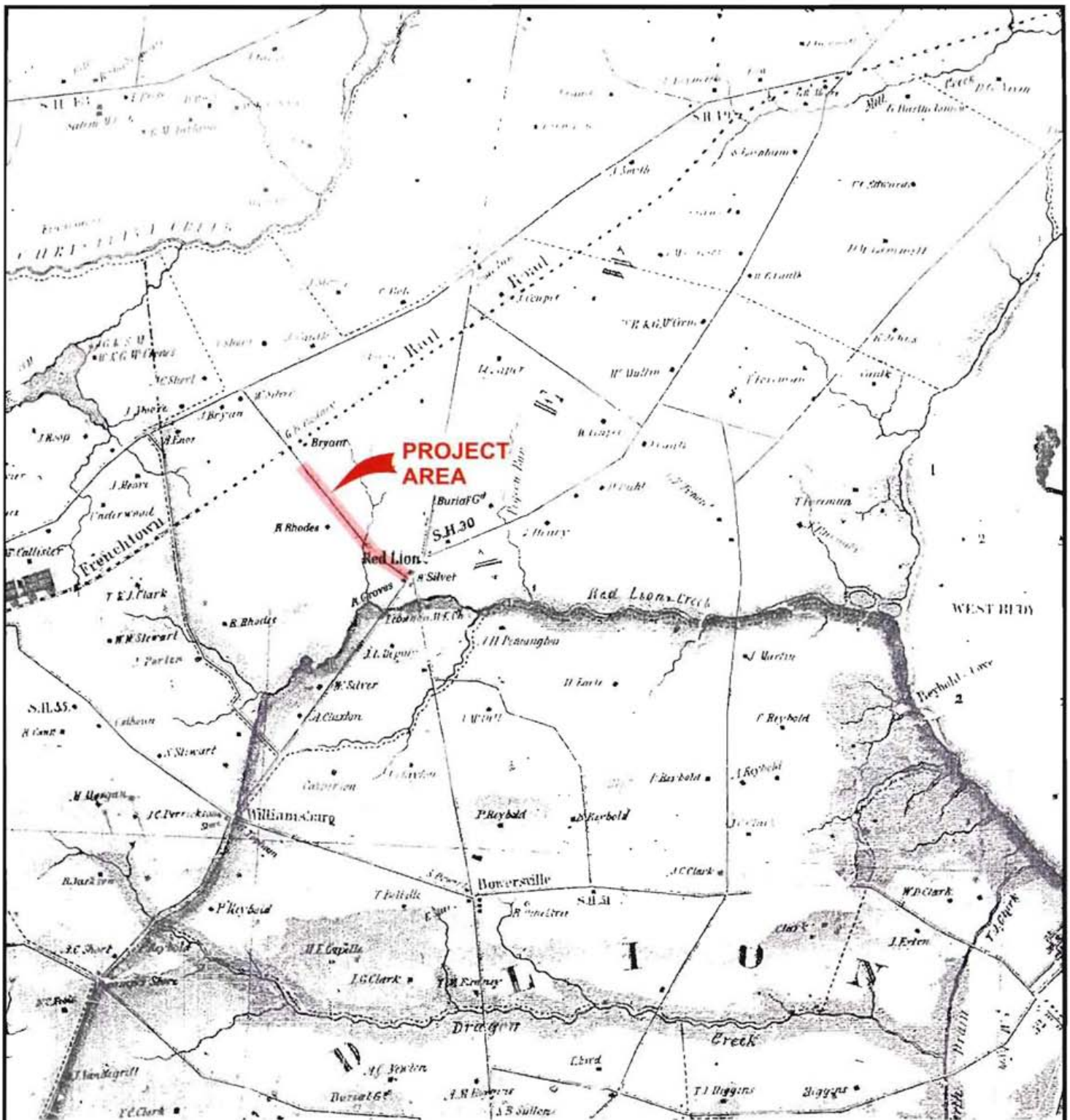
A hamlet had grown up around the tavern, as illustrated by an 1849 map of New Castle County (Rea and Price 1849). Most buildings were located on what is now Bear-Corbitt Road (Route 7). The map shows only a handful of buildings along Church Road (Figure 3). Red Lion would grow only incrementally over the next 100 years.

3.3 Rural Village Era (1838-1945)

In the century between the closing of the Red Lion Tavern in 1837, and the end of WWII in 1945, Red Lion grew slowly. An institution important to the village and the area, the Lebanon Methodist Church, would move to Church Road in 1853. As the nineteenth century progressed, the large landholdings that characterized the Pre-Railroad Era gave way to smaller holdings. But Red Lion, and the project APE, remained characterized by its rural nature.

Historic maps illustrate the Rural Village Era of the Red Lion area. The 1849 Rea and Price map (Figure 3) shows limited development along Church Road. Three buildings are located at the intersection of Church Road and Red Lion Road. At the northeast corner is a building belonging to W. Silver. Across Church Road, at the northwest corner of the intersection, is a building owned by R. Groves. A second building attributed to Silver is located to the south of the Groves building. Moving north, at approximately the midway point between Red Lion Road and the NC&F railroad tracks, on the west side of the road, is a farmhouse belonging to R. Rhodes. Where Church Road intersects the tracks, at the southeast quadrant, is a farmhouse labeled "Bryant," and also "G.B. Rodney." Perhaps Bryant was a tenant of Rodney's, a large landholder in the area. At the intersection of Church Road and the New Castle and Frenchtown Turnpike is a second farmhouse attributed to W. Silver.

A building still stands at the northwest quadrant of Church and Red Lion roads, but it is apparently not the building historically owned by R. Groves. According to New Castle County



SOURCE: REA AND PRICE 1849

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

CHURCH ROAD
(WYNNEFIELD TO S.R. 71) IMPROVEMENTS
NEW CASTLE HUNDRED
NEW CASTLE COUNTY

PROJECT AREA IN 1849

FIGURE - 3
NOT TO SCALE

SKELLY and LOY Inc.
CONSULTANTS IN
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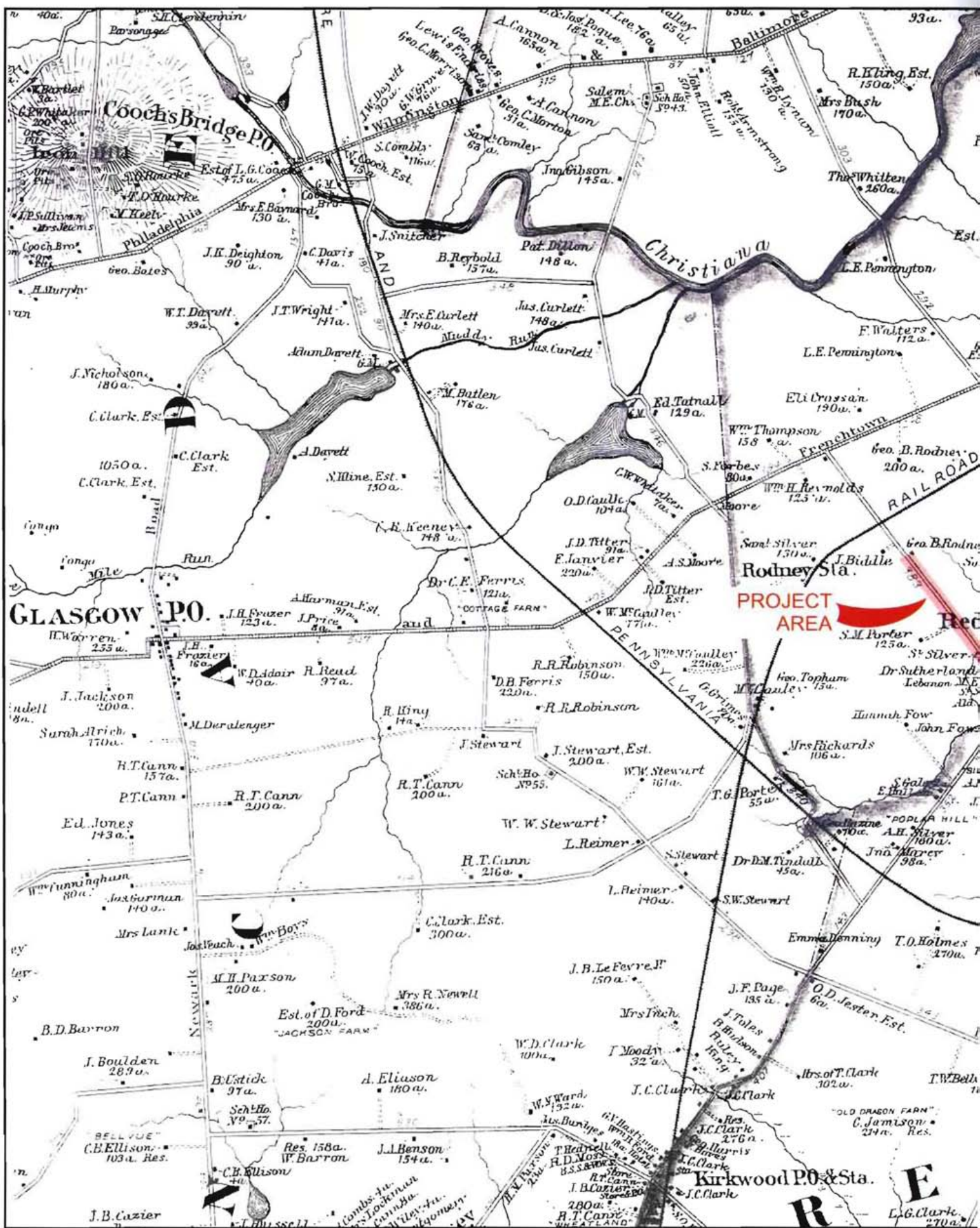
assessment records, the house currently at that location was constructed in 1882 (New Castle County Tax Assessment Office 2003). The two buildings at the intersection attributed to W. Silver are no longer extant. The Rhodes and Bryant houses are also gone.

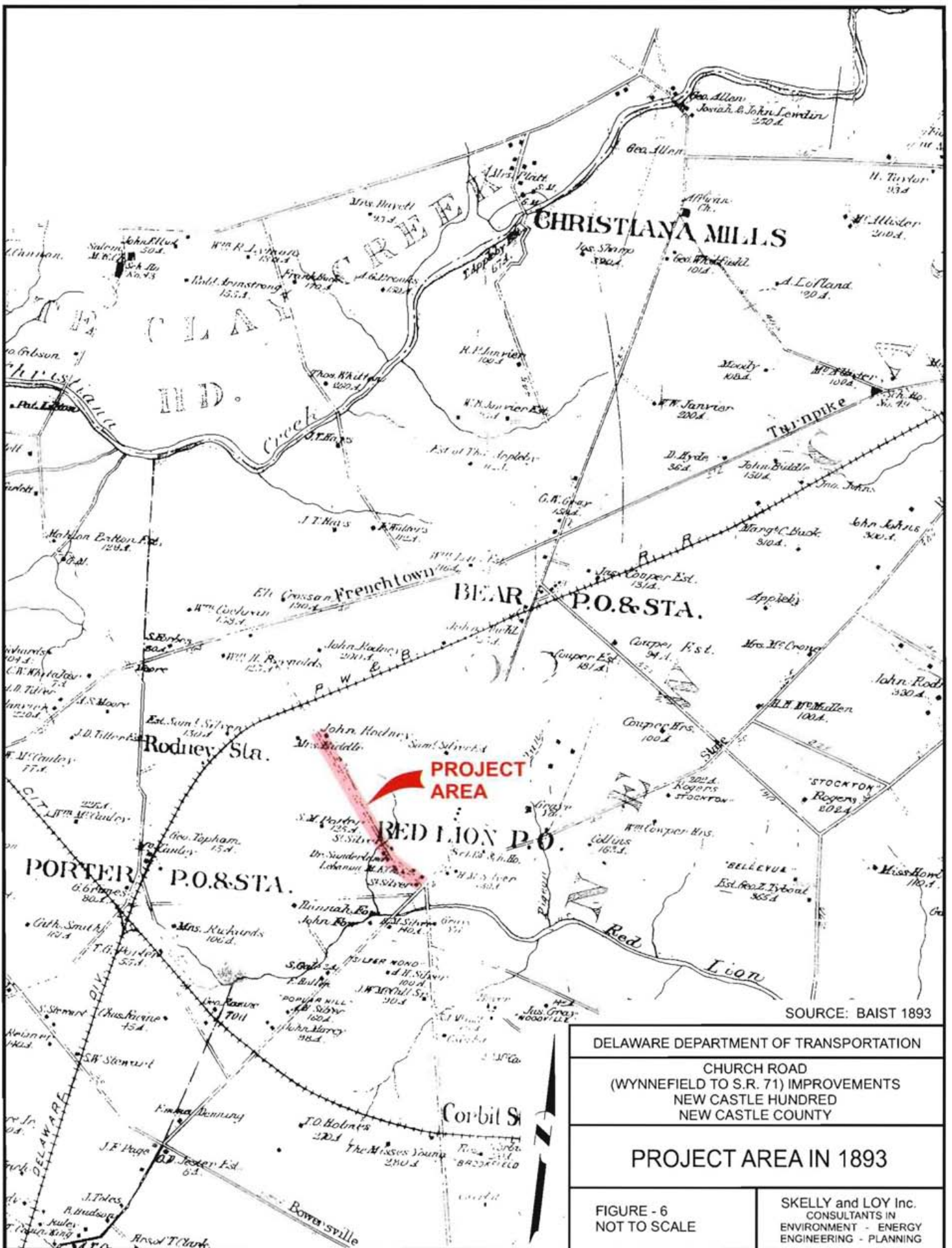
The Silver family dominated the Red Lion area in the Rural Village Era. William Silver came to the Red Lion area in 1810, after purchasing a large tract of land from David Porter. He acquired the Red Lion Tavern, which he used as a tavern, store building, and residence. In 1823, he erected a store building from which first he and later his sons traded. Presumably, it was the building located across Red Lion Road from the Grove House. During the Mexican-American War, James McNamee made government shoes in mechanic shops built by William Silver. The locations of the shops are unknown, but they were probably along Bear-Corbitt Road. William's sons later were postmasters for the town (Scharf 1888:853).

As the nineteenth century progressed, the Silver family became the most prominent landholders in the Red Lion area and the driving force behind the 1853 construction of the Lebanon (later the Red Lion) Methodist Church (Red Lion United Methodist Church 1991). At the time of the 1868 New Castle County atlas (Beers 1868; Figure 4), William Silver owned all three buildings at the intersection of Church and Red Lion roads. He also owned two other buildings in Red Lion and the farm at Church Road and the New Castle and Frenchtown Turnpike. Additionally, the Red Lion schoolhouse was erected on his property.

Church Road had become somewhat more developed by 1868. As noted, the Methodist Episcopal Church had been erected north of Red Lion Road, a Mrs. Rhodes owned a house near it as well as the farmhouse noted on the 1849 map, and just up the road were properties owned by Dr. R. Sutherland and W. Turner (both now gone). G.B. Rodney's farm now had a name, Rockland (N-5083), and J. Biddle had erected a house (N-5064) at the southwest quadrant of Church Road and the railroad tracks.

The Silvers's extensive holdings in the Red Lion area are most evident on the 1881 (G.M. Hopkins & Company 1881; Figure 5) and 1893 (Baist 1893; Figure 6) New Castle County atlases. Samuel Silver (one of William's sons) owned three houses in Red Lion, as well as a 161.9 ha (400.0 ac) farm on Bear-Corbit Road. His brother A[lbert].H. Silver owned farms of 64.8 ha (160.0 ac) and 40.5 ha (100.0 ac) to the south of Red Lion, as well as the store building. H[enry].M. Silver held 52.6 ha (130.0 ac) at the intersection of Bear-Corbit Road and Red Lion Road. Church Road in 1893 was no more developed than it was in 1868. In fact, further development of any note would not occur along the road until the second half of the twentieth century.



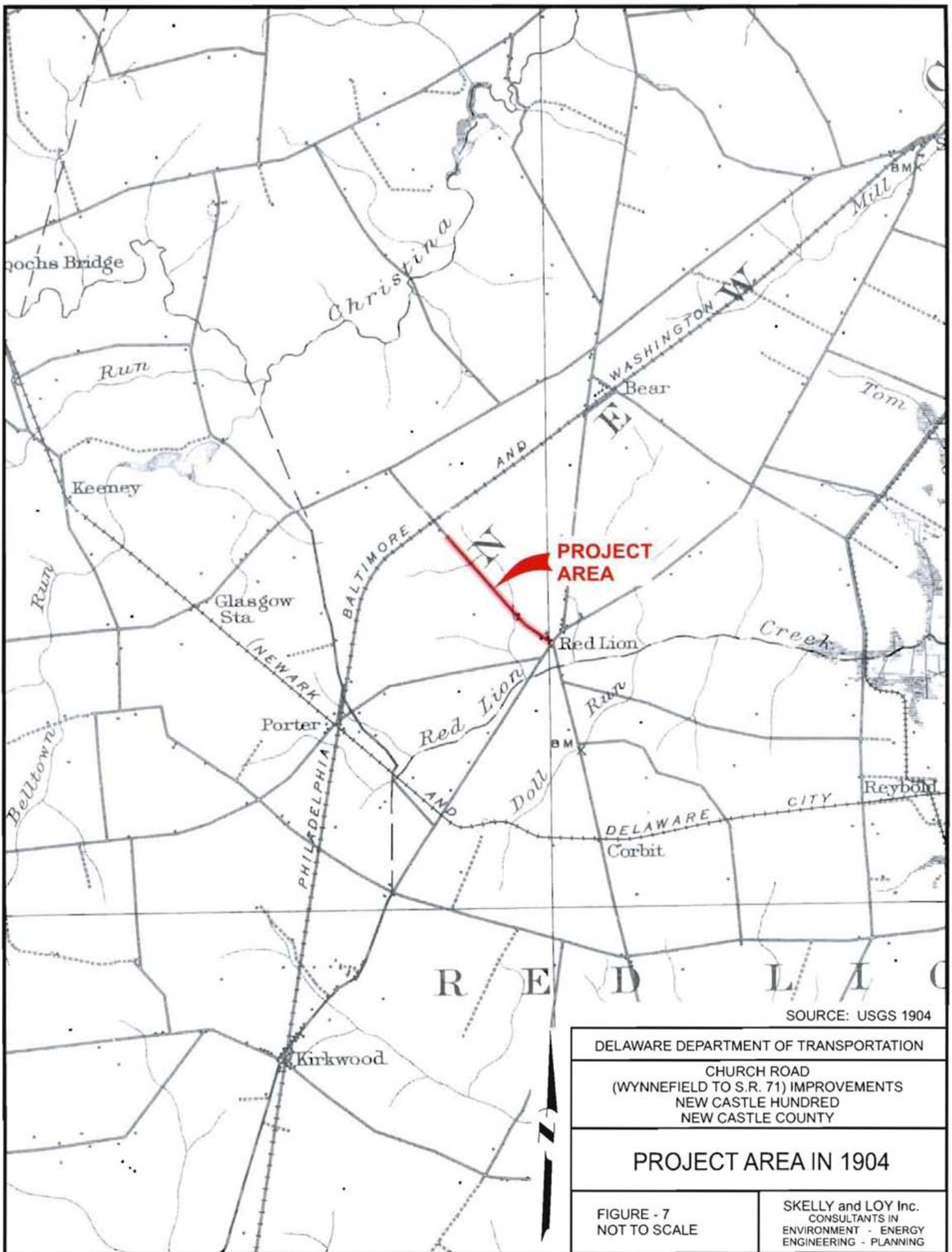


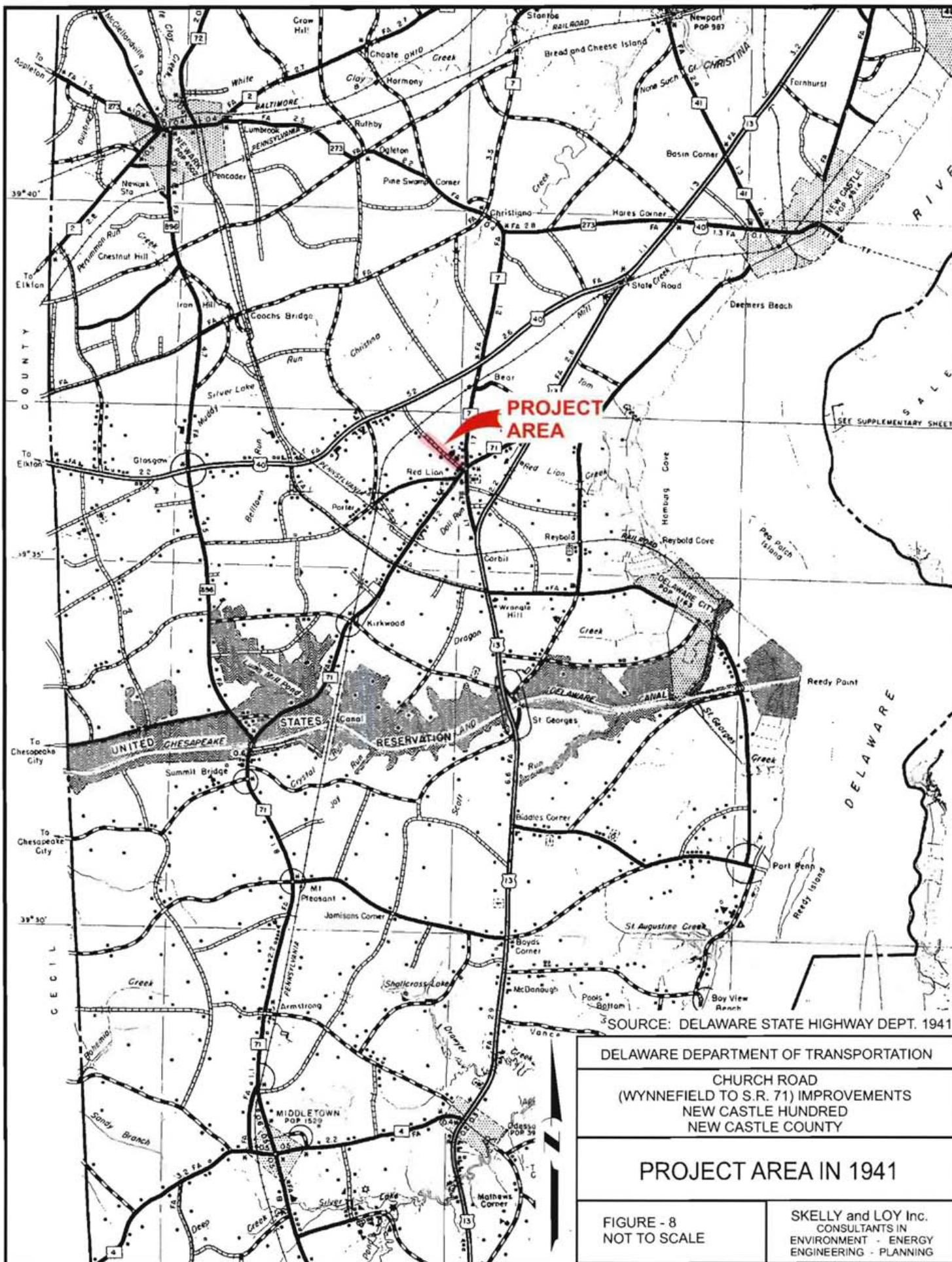
An end of the nineteenth century history (J.M. Runk & Company 1899:1436) described Red Lion as "a small but thriving village...surrounded by grain, vegetables, and small fruit farms." The description of the agricultural landscape is consistent with the history of agriculture in New Castle County and New Castle Hundred. The cultivation of grains and tobacco, staples of northern Delaware's early agricultural history, shifted beginning in the mid-nineteenth century to fruits and vegetables, commodities that could be shipped to nearby urban markets through the improved transportation infrastructure. Local farmers also turned to dairying and beef cattle, as large farms in the American Midwest began to dominate grain production. As farm size in New Castle County decreased, wealthy farmers who owned large tracts of land adopted the practice of leasing portions of their land holdings to tenants. Tenancy became quite pronounced. For instance, according to an 1888 state history, "Many large tracts of land are held by non-residents and are occupied by a class of citizens, whose tenure being uncertain, they do not become deeply interested in the affairs of their transient homes" (Scharf 1888:852). Tenant farms accounted for approximately half of the farms in the county, with many of the farms featuring domestic dwellings built specifically for tenants (Siders *et al.* 1991:3; Sheppard *et al.* 2001). The amount of land held in agricultural pursuits ranged from large estates of approximately 80.9 ha (200.0 ac) and small farms with as little as 10.1 ha (25.0 ac) (Herman 1987:113-114).

Records indicate that only two houses were erected within the project APE between the end of the nineteenth century and 1945. The houses, 1444 Church Road (N-14139) and a building located to its south (N-14140), were constructed following the conversion of a large farm to smaller lots (New Castle County Deeds 1943). Both are vernacular and undistinguished.

3.4 The Post-World War II Era (1945-Present)

Map evidence and the remaining building stock indicate that the built environment along Church Road changed very little during the first half of the twentieth century (Figures 7 and 8). This would change following WWII. The post-war era was a time of intense residential construction in New Castle County, when farmland was beginning to be subdivided for residential construction. As G.I.s returned home and began families (Herman *et al.* 1989:36; Hoffecker 1977:60), a building boom occurred; for the first time in history more Americans owned than rented houses. The majority of houses along Church Road, 21 out of 25, date from the post-WWII era. Within the project APE, 12 of 18 were built between 1945 and 1960.





The post-WWII houses within the APE are primarily vernacular versions of popular post-war architectural styles, typical of the large numbers of residential buildings constructed in formerly rural areas of New Castle Hundred during the 1940-1960± Suburbanization and Early Ex-urbanization chronological period. As the agricultural economy assumed less importance in the Red Lion area, and the area shifted into the role of a bedroom community for the growing commercial and industrial centers of New Castle County, suburban tract housing appeared on the landscape. Houses began appearing on Church Road in 1949, but the majority were constructed in the mid-1950s. The houses within the APE are vernacular in style, with Ranch and Cape Cod elements. These styles of homes are commonly found in post-World War II residential areas throughout the United States. The houses line Church Road; until the late twentieth century, self-contained, multiple unit developments were not constructed in the vicinity of the APE.